

WHILE APPEARED
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Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Polygraphs? No.

To be or not to be polygraphed? The question rocked Washington last week after Secretary of State George Shultz rebelled publicly against a presidential directive establishing government-wide lie detector examinations for persons with access to sensitive, secret information.

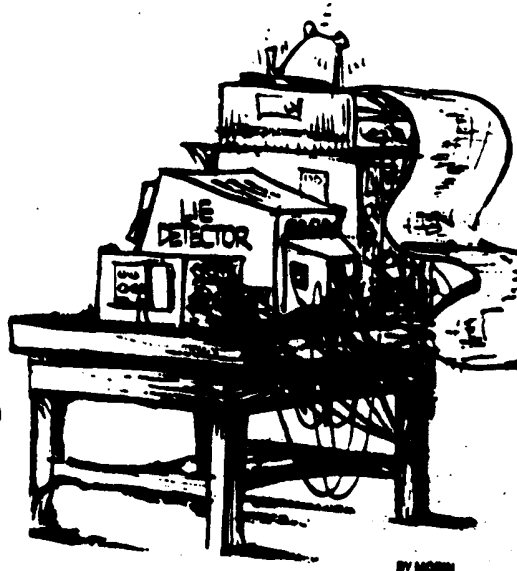
For the president and those who supported his directive, the issue was controlling leaks and spies. For Shultz the issue was personal trust. "The minute in this government I am told I am not trusted is the day I leave," he declared. He also expressed grave reservations about the lie detector's effectiveness in catching professional spies and leakers.

The CIA, which has required polygraph examinations of employees for years, couldn't see what all the fuss was about. For them, the polygraph seemed an effective "deterrent."

"Thousands of people in the intelligence community submit to polygraph examinations in recognition of the need to protect the nation's most vital secrets," a CIA statement asserted, noting "the number of leaks of sensitive, classified information in recent years makes clear that a growing number of those given special trust have not lived up to their obligation."

True enough. For five years leaks—of information and disinformation—have plagued the Reagan administration, embarrassing the government, complicating policy-making and creating international problems. Leaks have been used at high, high levels of government to undermine policy rivals and advance personal ambitions. They have caused real damage to policies and policy-makers. They have undermined our government's dignity. They have called into question the president's competence.

Unauthorized disclosure of sensitive or secret information may be a serious problem when the subject is policy and the recipients are journalists. It is an especially serious problem when the subject is defense-related and



the recipient is a potentially hostile foreign government. This form of unauthorized disclosure is called spying. Whether the spy works for money (as the Walker ring apparently did) or for love of another country or ideology (as the Rosenbergs did), spying can seriously damage national security. The Walkers, for example, have apparently compromised our communication system and endangered aspects of our defenses.

That the Soviet Union encourages such betrayals of national security is beyond reasonable doubt. They also rely on spying to promote development. Documents captured when the French government broke a major spy ring two years ago (and expelled 47 Soviet officials) confirmed that the Soviets rely heavily on planned theft and stolen technology and field large networks of spies to steal the desired technology.

Spying is big, serious, dirty business and does us real harm. Recent disclosures suggest, moreover, that it may be increasing.

I have not the slightest inclination to minimize the damage that leaks do to our polity nor what spies do to our national security. I do not doubt that further steps could and should be taken to protect us from them. Routinely submitting thousands of government employees to lie detector examinations, however, does not seem an appropriate remedy for the undoubted ills of espionage and leaking.

First, there is the unreliability of the polygraph, which, as the American Foreign Service Association noted last week, was recently demonstrated in the case of Larry Wu-Tai Chin, a former CIA employee who spied for the People's Republic of China for 30 years. During that period he passed numerous polygraph tests. The polygraph is a gross instrument that is probably least effective against the most effective professional spies.

But there are more compelling reasons to oppose its government-wide use. The institutionalization of distrust may damage the political culture on which democracy rests.

Political scientists have long agreed that of all forms of government, democracies have the greatest need for mutual trust. "We scarcely perceive the immense political trust we repose in one another," wrote Walter Bagehot, the great 19th-century English commentator on his own country's democratization. Bagehot believed "the first prerequisite of elective government is the mutual confidence of the electors," which he said contrasted sharply with the "diffused distrust and indiscriminate suspicion" of semi-barbarous peoples.

Democratic politics requires that we trust our country and our future to the voting decisions of people whose backgrounds, experience, intentions and character we do not know. Surely, we cannot have less confidence in those "entrusted" to govern us.

A policy that submits all government officials dealing with secret or sensitive information to examination by lie detector either assumes they may be persons of doubtful character or loyalty or else assumes that leaders should set an example in a system of institutionalized distrust.

Routine, government-wide use of polygraphs violates some very basic tenets of liberal democracy. It requires that government employees prove they are innocent of wrongdoing. It requires they admit officials into private, even nonconscious realms of feeling over which only totalitarian governments claim jurisdiction. It requires, in other words, that government employees give up basic rights of American citizens as a condition of employment.

Are such requirements necessary? They may be in the specialized world of covert intelligence and counter-intelligence whose political culture requires institutionalized distrust. It does not follow that they are necessary or desirable in other domains.

How then are we to protect ourselves against the depredations of spies and leakers? The answer, I believe, lies in education and socialization that breed and emphasize loyalty as a virtue; in careful background checks of persons appointed to positions of trust; in the scrutiny of a free press; in the prompt and severe punishment of infringement.

Leakers, once identified, should be fired, not tolerated. Real spies, who weaken us by the betrayal of trust as well as of secrets, should be the object of our gravest condemnation. To defeat them it is not necessary to undermine the freedom we seek to protect.

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